

**Remarks Prepared For
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**For the
Enhanced Safety of Vehicles Conference
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Thank you, Ron for that introduction.

I am honored to be with you for the opening of the 19th International Technical Conference on the Enhanced Safety of Vehicles.

Let me take a moment to thank Ron Medford and Joseph Kanianthra for their outstanding efforts in organizing this excellent conference.

I would also like to welcome you to our nation's capital. I encourage you to take advantage of the historical and cultural sights that make Washington a world-class city.

Speaking of world-class, this conference is a tangible expression of nations of the world coming together to advance automotive safety.

With more than 1.2 million motor vehicle fatalities worldwide every year, our purpose is clear – to reduce death and injury on the roads of the world. This conference serves that purpose by gathering the international community together to share important technical information to advance vehicle safety.

The theme for this conference - The Evolution of Automobile Safety from Experimental to Enhanced Safety Vehicles - was chosen because it captures the spirit of where automobile safety has been, but more importantly, where it needs to go.

30 years ago, auto safety began its evolution by focusing on passive safety and crashworthiness standards to improve safety on our roadways. This was needed and an appropriate focus in its time.

Because of the innovative and dedicated work of safety researchers, many of whom are in this room, outstanding progress has been made in the area of passive safety.

In fact, an analysis performed by NHTSA earlier this year estimates that 330,000 lives have been saved in the US alone due to safety technologies in vehicles since the mid 1960's.

We have enjoyed such success that we are quickly arriving at a point of diminishing returns where continuing the emphasis on passive safety will not drive fatality rates downward at the same rate as in the past.

Our challenge now is to prevent crashes and decrease crash energy. Fortunately, with the advent of new technologies in smarter vehicles, we have the opportunity to take auto safety to the next level. But we have a long way to go.

By focusing on technologies to avoid crashes, we envision a world in which vehicles will not collide, or if they do, the force of the crash will be significantly reduced.

You are uniquely aware of the opportunities that technology offers for improving safety and the safety community will rely on you to make the next major step upward in enhancing the safety of vehicles.

Every nation and every region has its unique safety problems, but all can be helped with enhanced technology. For example, rollover crashes are responsible for nearly 1/3 of all vehicle occupant fatalities in the United States.

At the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, we seek solutions to this increasing safety threat. We are focused on a four-point strategy to reduce rollover crash injury and death.

First, safety belts are the single most effective vehicle safety technology, but they must be worn to be effective. Secretary Mineta and I have been focused on getting safety belt use to 90%, the level of our neighbors in Canada and much of Western Europe.

But there is more you can do, through advances in technology to make belts more effective when they are worn. We believe that safety belt effectiveness can be improved through sensor technology, pre-tensioners and improved design. Why should we settle for only 80% effectiveness in preventing deaths in rollovers?

Second, there is a role for enhanced technologies to prevent the rollover in the first place. For instance, our analysis of electronic stability control showed a reduction in fatal rollover crashes of 63% in SUVs, and 30% in cars.

We know there are other promising technologies that can reduce the occurrence of rollover crashes, and we are actively seeking

performance tests to speed the introduction of these technologies into the fleet.

However effective rollover prevention might be, these crashes will occur. When they do, occupant ejection must be prevented, which is our third element of the strategy. The combination of safety belts, side curtain airbags, and better window materials are all-important in ejection prevention. Our improved standard for side impact protection will set the stage for improvements to side curtain airbags in rollover crashes. We challenge the industry to help us leverage that opportunity.

Fourth, improving the structural integrity of the vehicle compartment and diminishing roof crush is important to protect the head and neck. In keeping with this, our proposal to upgrade our roof crush standard should be published this summer.

Advanced technologies are also at the forefront of other road safety initiatives.

Our ITS projects will help drivers avoid rear-end collisions, road departures and unintended lane departures, and will use integrated vehicle-based and infrastructure intelligent systems to prevent intersection crashes.

Our *Next Generation 9-1-1* project lays the foundation for better emergency response in a wireless society. Future systems will use text, data and video to improve incident management and emergency response from the first responder to the trauma center.

Many life saving technologies are beginning to find their way into the market, but must be more widely deployed to reach their full potential.

An unprecedented level of cooperation between all governments and the private sector will be required to facilitate research, system standards and deployment.

It is very encouraging to see the global community coming together to improve vehicle safety. For the first time in 50 years, the World Health Organization selected Road Safety as its theme for last year's World Health Day. The United Nations passed a resolution calling attention to the issue, and to invite the World Health Organization to coordinate road safety efforts among UN agencies.

This collaboration is working on a variety of strategies including good practical guidelines, a global road safety legislation database and a framework for implementing the UN resolution on global road safety. The W.H.O. and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Working Party on Road Traffic Safety will continue to convene collaborative meetings to tackle this global epidemic.

And last November, the United Nations' Working Party 29 adopted the first global technical regulation under the 1998 Agreement on Harmonization. This pioneering achievement is leading the way to greater harmonization of vehicle safety standards.

Over the past four years, I have had the privilege of working for a man who cares passionately about safety - my boss, Secretary Norman Mineta. His commitment is so strong that he has rightfully become known as the "Safety Secretary."

During his watch, we have made great strides in safety. Since 2000, we have increased safety belt usage to 80% - a record high in the United States, saving more than 2,000 lives a year.

As a former member of Congress, he chaired the Transportation Oversight Committee in Congress, representing the Silicon Valley area of California. He later served as Secretary of Commerce before President Bush appointed him Transportation Secretary in 2001. His

lifetime of public service at the local and national level is an inspiration to all of us who seek to serve. His experiences in technology, commerce, and transportation make him the perfect keynote speaker for the Advanced Safety of Vehicles conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to introduce U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta.